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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001088

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

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SUBJECT: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES CONTINUE TO DEFY SOVIET-ERA RELIGIOUS
SUSPICION ST

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1077; B) DUSHANBE 1078

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Ann Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy
Dushanbe, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY: Following a scheduled court hearing, Greg Olds, Jehovah's Witnesses Associate General Counsel and Vladimir Voyevodin, a Jehovah's Witnesses lawyer from Almaty, Kazakhstan met with PolOff July 20 to update the Embassy on the legal case pertaining to the group's confiscated religious literature (REFTEL A) and two American citizens forced by the State Committee on National Security to flee Tajikistan. A Dushanbe City Court judge postponed the appeals hearings until July 24. Meanwhile, according to Olds, both American citizens are safe, but their whereabouts remain a mystery. END SUMMARY.

RELIGIOUS LITERATURE REMAINS IN CUSTOMS LIMBO

[¶2.](#) (SBU) In an effort to release its confiscated literature, the local chapter of Jehovah's Witnesses had filed two suits in two different Tajik district courts. One suit filed in the Sino District Court is against the customs authority for confiscating Jehovah's Witnesses' imported literature and the second is filed in the Shomansur District Court against the Ministry of Culture challenging its unfavorable "expert" analysis of the literature. Because the customs authority and Ministry of Culture are located in two different jurisdictions, two different cases had to be filed. At the initial hearings, judges had dismissed both cases because of technicalities. On July 20 a three judge panel was supposed to have heard the appeal from the Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that the judge in the Shomansur District Court case violated the law by dismissing the case. A judge informed Olds July 20 that both appeals would take place July 24.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Greg Olds informed PolOff he is leaving Tajikistan July 25 for another destination in Central Asia. However, Jehovah's Witnesses local lawyer Jamshed Hojibaev will represent the organization here in Tajikistan. Should the organization decide to send another lawyer from its world headquarters in New York, PolOff reminded Olds of the new visa application procedures which would require a Jehovah's Witnesses lawyer from the United States to apply for a visa at the Tajik Embassy in Washington prior to arriving in country.

[¶4.](#) (C) Despite the fact that the State Committee on National

Security has confiscated the Jehovah's Witnesses' imported literature, the group continues to import materials via airplane. The confiscated shipments had come by rail. The air shipments have continued to arrive from March through June even after the other shipments were detained. Jehovah's Witnesses showed PolOff all documentation and stamped approvals from airport customs. The imports are for the same Jehovah's Witnesses organization registered in Tajikistan and the procedure for obtaining customs clearance was the same as the rail shipments. The amount of materials arriving by air is significantly less. (Comment: The group's ability to import literature by plane indicates that either the airport customs authorities, rail customs and the State Committee on National Security are not talking to each other, or the government's main concern is not the content but the quantity of literature the Jehovah's Witnesses are importing.)

15. (SBU) On July 20, Olds met with Ziyoyev the head of the Department of Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Culture. (Note: Muradullo Davlatov is the Deputy Minister of Culture who really oversees the Department and was formerly the chairman of the State Committee on Religious Affairs.) Olds viewed the meeting as positive and said that Ziyoyev promised the Jehovah's Witnesses an explanation of written inspection requirements for importing literature. Olds explained to PolOff that that Jehovah's Witnesses can agree to import a reduced amount of literature but was adamant that the organization would continue importing literature because the group views use of its literature as an act of worship.

AMCIT LOCATION REMAINS UNCLEAR

16. (C) Olds continued to say James and Jane Hwang have left Tajikistan, but would not reveal where they are currently located. [Background: State Committee on National Security officials stopped James Hwang in Dushanbe July 13 and ordered

DUSHANBE 00001088 002 OF 002

him and his wife leave Tajikistan the very next day (RETEL B).] Before leaving the meeting July 20 Olds remarked, "Theoretically you know, the Hwangs could still return because they do have a valid visa." PolOff discouraged the Hwangs return under current circumstances, informed Olds that the Tajik government is most likely keeping a keen eye out for them, and explained that if they do return they could face serious consequences. Olds agreed and dismissed his earlier comment, saying that he doesn't really think they would come back. PolOff reminded Olds that the Embassy would like to assist American citizens and advocate for religious freedom and tolerance within Tajikistan, but needs to have full and accurate information from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

17. (SBU) When Olds met with EmbOffs July 16 he had mentioned that one of the problems the security officials had with Hwang was that he was influencing minors at a local school. Olds at the time said that Hwang had never set foot in a school to proselytize. What he and Hwang neglected to tell EmbOffs earlier was that when Hwang was questioned by the Ministry of Culture on May 11, it was not simply about his registration. As it turns out, on May 11 Hwang was not only handing out pamphlets on the street with one other Jehovah's Witness as stated, he was handing out pamphlets with minors. The Ministry of Culture sent the Jehovah's Witnesses a letter saying that Hwang violated Articles 3 and 21 of the current law on religion prohibiting engaging minors in religious activity without parental consent. Jehovah's Witnesses say they have documents signed by the parents granting permission for the minors. The parents are Jehovah's Witnesses themselves. However they are "divided families." Apparently in both sets of parents, at least one parent did not give consent, which gives room for the government to accuse Hwang of illegally influencing minors.

18. (C) COMMENT: Olds has not been forthcoming and direct with information. He refuses to answer questions relating to the whereabouts of the Hwangs or what the Jehovah's Witnesses' future plans are. Post cannot confirm that the Hwangs have

indeed left Tajikistan; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials told EmbOffs on July 19 that security and immigration officials had checked all exit points and had found no record of the Hwangs' departure. Post is concerned the Hwangs may return to Tajikistan, based on Olds' vague comments about their still valid visa and that they have been assigned to Tajikistan for life. If Hwang returns to Tajikistan or if the State Committee for National Security discovers that Jehovah's Witnesses continue to import literature despite the current confiscation, it may view those acts as blatant defiance of governmental authority. This could further erode the operating climate for nongovernmental and religious organizations, especially those with American staff and members. END COMMENT.
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